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CS24 Image Critique  
April 19, 2005

Image source: <http://www.ebfarm.com/images/1lbCelloCarrots.jpg>



This one-pound bag of organic carrots is encased in a partially transparent, partially translucent purple plastic bag. The carrots are a pure orange and have slight ridges running vertically as rings along their skin. They lay horizontally and appear more cylindrical than conical, with their tops and ends fully clothed by purple plastic and only their middles exposed. Prominently displayed in the center of the bag is the "Earthbound Farms" product emblem. The end of the bag is knotted closed. The pure white background is indicative of the image's use as a glamour shot for the company's website, but you could probably find a bag just like it in a local supermarket.

On the computer, our interaction with the object is purely visual and expectedly so. But an irony lies in the fact that our real life interactions with the referent of this image would be equally limited to the visual domain. Food is a part of life that we so often experience through taste and smell, but the bag reduces the interaction to a purely visual level. You can't further inspect the carrots because the bag is tied shut. Even our sense of touch is confounded by the plastic intermediary.

Beyond just limiting inspection to the visual domain, the level of visual intimacy with the carrots themselves is taxed by the translucent colored plastic packaging (though some other packaging goes further by using plastic translucently colored as a saturated version of a produce item's color as a means to candy coat our perception of what may otherwise be produce of less "standard" coloring). More prominent than the carrots themselves is the brand label. Centering the logo and the visibly orange carrot areas increases the likelihood that they will be seen in a stacked retail display. Furthermore, through experience our brains become cognitively wired to perceive the written word and can barely avoid it. It is centrally aligned, with a white colored background. Its crisp text and vector graphics are flanked by a relatively unremarkable sea of orange and purple. What is being sold here is not a tasty root nurtured in and pulled from the ground. The focus is on the words, and so the consumer is buying a plastic bag containing "Carrots" that are "Organic". In fact, the role of the carrots themselves is largely pertinent to how the bag will be later utilized by the consumer. The clear plastic center allows for quick visual knowledge of when the bag is nearly empty without removing the carrots from their packaging identification.

In essence, the plastic bag sheath declares the enclosed carrots a commodity. The only choices you'll find in the supermarket are between the bags: 1, 2, or 5 pounds. The carrots are all the same. They have no trace of the earth from whence they came. There's none of the poisonous but perishable green top to indicate from when they came. Their near identical growth patterns and processing demonstrates the industrial processes that produced them. The carrots are practically reduced to easily reproducible vector graphics forms.

Ultimately, the bag represents an example of man's harnessing of nature. For us, it is a given that the dirty, naturally winding ways of *Daucus carota*'s starchy root have been tamed by industrial agriculture into a clean, easily packaged commodity. There's no room for surprise or variation in the carrot's characteristics. The commodity status of the carrot is further implied by its multilingual labeling, as seen by the bag's outreach to French-speaking seekers of "Carottes." That likely means that people as far from Earthbound's California home as Quebec may be in the market for the same bag of carrots that Rhode Island consumers may choose to buy. A carrot is a carotte is a carrot. A final irony, the "Organic" label attempts to set it apart, make it distinct from other bags of carrots that are not labeled as such. However, the reliance on words to describe this characteristic of the food only serves to emphasize the commodity nature of the product. It appears that the food that awaits in the bag can be adequately described by the words on the label and a backdrop of orange cylinders.

The intermingling of analytic frameworks worked surprisingly well. Different concepts from design, perception, semiotics, discourse analysis, computer graphics can easily build off of each other in complimentary ways. The combined strengths of each framework really allow for a fuller deconstruction of an image, whether that image is ordinary like the bag of carrots or extraordinary abstract art. It would be hard to discuss social context of an image without delineating the image's design features, many of which are themselves dependent on cognitive perceptual properties. Having a grasp of the different frameworks allowed for a more confident and meaningful analysis of the bag of carrots.